

# The Builder.

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HE superintending inspectors under the Public Health Act, are making their reports to the general board, on the preliminary inquiries instituted in various towns; and a few of these, namely, the reports on Whitehaven, Fareham, Ware and Amwell, Uxbridge, and Croydon, are now before us. A large section of our readers look to know something of the result of these inquiries, and, although we cannot pretend to put before them any complete view of the matter, we will endeavour to satisfy them to a certain extent. The reports are printed in an octavo form,\* and consist of from twenty to forty pages each. They one and all give a miserable picture of the existing state of things, and show "that the application of the Public Health Act is not only imperatively necessary, but will be of the greatest advantage, morally, physically, and pecuniarily, as the benefits will be reaped alike by rich and poor. The labourer will be relieved from much preventable sickness, poverty, and despair; the health of all classes will be improved, and the present oppressive rates reduced."

To the statement, as to the pecuniary advantages,—“that the requisite measures may be carried out at a positive saving to the inhabitants,”—the said inhabitants do not all seem disposed to give credence, whatever may be their opinion of the report in other respects. Of this, however, hereafter.

Looking to one of the fullest of the reports (that on Whitehaven), we find the inspector (Mr. Rawlinson) saying, that in every town he has visited, “few beside the medical gentlemen know any thing of the utter wretchedness and misery produced by a want of proper sanitary regulations;” that this particular town has a great excess of disease distinctly traceable to preventable causes; and that the health of the inhabitants may be improved, and the poor-rates reduced by, “first, a full and constant supply of pure water laid on in every house and in every room-tenement. Secondly, by a system of sewers laid down in the town, and of drains properly arranged and taken into every house, back street, court, yard, and alley. Thirdly, by the general adoption and use of water-closets or soil-pan apparatus, fitted up with proper tubular drains to convey away the refuse from each, and by the removal of all liquid refuse in similar drains laid at such a depth as shall insure, by means of the same excavation, the perfect drainage of the foundations of all dwelling-houses. Fourthly, by opening out blind courts and alleys, by removing all open middens in confined places, and forbidding their accumulation, by closing all objectionable cellar and room-tenements, by improved paving of all yards, courts, and alleys, and by a regular system of surface cleansing with water.”

He further recommends that a cemetery should be provided, the existing burial grounds being amidst houses, and unduly crowded; that the place should be better lighted, and that the refuse of the town, by being applied to agricul-

tural purposes, might be made to lessen the rates, and produce a fund for improving the place. There is a public school here, the yard and convenience of which are in an indescribable state; “the children have to pick their way in and out of it as best they can.” The inspector found it difficult to choose his way in broad day-light!

A pretty place in which “to rear the tender mind, and teach the young idea how to shoot,”—to induce careful habits and love of order! The effect of external circumstances in the formation of character is ignorantly overlooked by all classes of society. What is attributed to disposition (and the inevitable) in after days, and affects not merely the well-being and happiness of the individual through life, but of society generally, is oftener the result of the circumstances under which he was placed, and might, without difficulty, have been changed or regulated.

In Whitehaven the habitations of the labouring classes are most injuriously crowded together, and unfit cellars are used as dwellings to a great extent. A report made to the local Board of Health there says properly:—

“Your committee cannot condemn in terms too strong the habitation of cellars, which exists in many parts of the town to a great extent. Nothing can be more injurious to the health of a labouring community than being obliged to occupy abodes of such a nature. Deprived alike of the cheering and invigorating influence of light and fresh air, it is in these dens of misery and wretchedness that disease, particularly of an infectious nature, seizes upon its unresisting and helpless victims. From these, fresh sources of infection spring up, and a neighbourhood that might otherwise be healthy is rendered the reverse of this, from the habitation of cellars being permitted to exist.”

And not merely is it rendered less healthy bodily, but less happy, less good. A moral infection spreads, even more disastrous in its results!

The cost of such districts to the community is placed beyond cavil. “Bad sanitary regulations, excessive sickness and mortality, with burdensome and oppressive poor-rates, must ever be associated. They are cause and effect.”

A statement as to the gas-lighting of the town bears out the truth of our often repeated assertion (so often repeated that the echo of it is now to be heard in all quarters), that with reduced prices comes increase of consumption, and advantage as well to the shareholder as the public. The price charged for gas here, when the works were first established, was 12s. 6d. per 1,000 cubic feet. This was reduced, the chairman of the company said, “as the consumption increased, to 10s., 8s., and, in 1847, to 4s. per 1,000 feet. Since the last reduction, a very considerable increase has taken place in the consumption, and ground has been purchased to increase the works, which will be commenced immediately. Generally speaking, we divide an annual dividend of 10 per cent. But after the price was reduced to 4s. per 1,000 feet we did not divide so much. The first year was only 5 per cent., but for the last half-year we did divide 10 per cent.”

“The gradual reduction in price detailed by the chairman,” says the Inspector, “is a strong incentive to comprehensive and liberal measures, as the increased consumption consequent upon a reduction of 4s. from 8s., in the space of one year, raises the per centage up to the same rank, namely, 10 per cent., and there is no proof that this is the final limit of reduction.”

Existing evils are said to be frightful, and the inspector remarks that those who have hitherto had the management of the town affairs must have thoroughly neglected the condition of the inhabitants, or such an amount of human misery and degradation as is there found could not have been accumulated.

Will succeeding trustees commit the crime which a continuance in such a course, now that the evils of it are known, unquestionably involves?

The report on Fareham, by the same inspector, shows, amongst other things—

“1. That the town of Fareham is not so healthy as from its pleasant and open position it ought to be. That, in a great measure, this arises from the want of proper sewers and drains. That the stagnant ditches and open dung-heaps render the inhabitants liable to any epidemic disease whenever such unfortunately prevails.

2. That, according to the medical testimony, excess of disease and fever may be distinctly traced to this want of drainage, and to an imperfect and impure water supply; and that a low state of morality is ever attendant upon bad or imperfect sanitary regulations, as stated by the vicar.

3. That many grievous public and private nuisances exist, such as open and stagnant ditches, privies, and pigsties, in contact with dwelling-houses, exposed middens near open and shallow wells of water, and cesspools in confined yards and houses.

4. That the present churchyard burial-ground should be closed, and another cemetery provided.”

It maintains that the health of the inhabitants would be improved and their moral condition raised, by a perfect system of drainage, a constant and cheap supply of pure water, the use of soil-pan apparatus, improved roads properly cleansed, and the application of the Public Health Act to the town.

The inhabitants, however, or a section of them, decided, at a public meeting held two or three days ago, against the introduction of the Act. The vicar of Fareham, the Rev. Wendham Madden, and an intelligent minority, sought to prevent a hasty decision, but the resolution was nevertheless carried.

In the report on Ware,\* the inspector, Mr. W. Ranger, dwells on the importance of ventilation in preventing disease, and mentions the following illustrative facts which occurred at Aylesbury:—

“Soon after the formation of the union in 1835 and 1836, the parish workhouse, which then stood in a meadow, was purchased by the guardians of the union: the building itself underwent much alteration and considerable enlargement, so that the space around, which before was free and open, became occupied by new buildings, outhouses, &c., and a high boundary wall was erected. In these premises the inmates of the union-house year after year were severely and fatally affected with gastric fever, diarrhoea, and dysentery; this state of things led to various measures, and all that were practicable were in succession adopted, but without effect, so that it became necessary to decide on abandoning the building as unfit for the purposes of the union after having expended a considerable sum on the additions, &c.), solely from its insalubrity. A new union-house has since been erected on an open elevated situation; and in this building, which has never been occupied since 1844, dysentery has never arisen, and the autumnal gastric and intestinal affections are far milder and infinitely more rare than in any other part of the district, though no alteration of the diet of the inmates has been made. The union-house hospital is made the receptacle of most of the chronic and protracted cases for different parts of the union, and in the winter months nearly all the beds are often thus occupied. The new union-house is thus made subservient to

\* We returned some time ago to the efforts of the vicar, the Rev. J. W. Rakestraw, and the parish authorities, in promoting a sanitary inquiry here.

\* By W. Clowes and Sons, Stamford-street, for Her Majesty's Stationery-office.